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ABSTRACT

This paper defines and describes nontraditional Professional Development School (PDS) sites, atypical collaborations, and the responsibility of schools, colleges, and departments of education in selecting and developing those sites. The paper suggests that the influence of PDSs on both school reform and the preparation of educators is likely to be attenuated by the way in which they are typically defined and implemented. While traditional PDSs are based at one school site, nontraditional PDSs can be located outside of a school, at multiple sites, or within entire school systems. At nontraditional sites, there is not just concern for the preparation of preservice teachers but also for the preparation of educational professionals such as principals and other educational administrators, school counselors, school psychologists, and related professionals (e.g., school social workers). Nontraditional PDSs focus on retraining practicing teachers or on other forms of staff development rather than just on training preservice teachers. Nontraditional sites may be located in inner city schools and poor rural schools rather than high-performing schools. Finally, nontraditional PDSs may include parents and community partners as well as school and university partners. (Contains 13 references.) (SM)

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PDS Site Selection: Implications for Educational Reform and Restructuring

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This symposium is about nontraditional professional development school sites, atypical collaborations, and the responsibility of schools, colleges, and departments of education (SCDEs) in selecting and developing those sites. Since their inception in the mid-1980s, professional development schools (PDSs) have been touted as an important educational reform mechanism in public schools as well as in restructuring the curriculum of colleges and universities that prepare educators (Holmes Group, 1986). PDSs are a growing phenomenon with over 1,035 PDSs in existence in 47 states in 1998 (Abdal-Haqq, 1999) and with 46% of surveyed SCDEs participating in them as of 1993 (AACTE, 1995).

The basic premise of this paper is that the influence of PDSs on both school reform and the preparation of educators is likely to be attenuated by the way in which they are typically being defined and implemented. The objective of this symposium is to describe some nontraditional PDSs and what is being learned from them.

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How can I speak about nontraditional PDS sites when the question of what constitutes a PDS is far from settled at this point in time? Indeed, a number of authors have noted that universal agreement about what a PDS is does not exist (e.g., Metcalf-Turner, 1999; Teitel, 1996). Although a focus on student achievement, pre-service professional training, in-service professional development, and school-based research are frequently cited characteristics of PDSs, a variety of definitions and criteria for professional development schools have been offered (e.g., Holmes Group, 1990; Murray, 1993; NCATE, 1997). What I can speak about is "modal tendencies" or most common characteristic of PDS and compare the nontraditional sites to these modal tendencies. Thus, what do these nontraditional sites do and what do they tend not do as compared to some of the frequently-cited definitions and descriptions of professional development schools such as those proposed by the Holmes Group (1990) and by NCATE (1997)?

Traditionally, PDSs are almost exclusively conceptualized as single physical sites or single locations within public schools. "We define PDSs as a regular elementary, middle, or high school that works in partnership with a university..." (Holmes Group, 1990). "The [PDS] unit is defined as the partnership as it resides within a P-12 school" (NCATE, 1997). Moreover, the most common PDS appears to reside in an elementary school (Abdal-Haqq, 1997). As such, sites that are located outside of a school, especially an elementary school, multi-site PDSs, and an entire school system as a PDS represent nontraditional PDS sites and atypical collaborations. In an effort to respond to multi-site PDS, the NCATE PDS Draft Standards Project is currently working on the challenge of accommodating multi-site PDSs within the PDS Draft Standards.

Secondly, professional development schools are primarily a teacher education rather than a more general educational movement. As originally defined by the Holmes Group, PDSs were viewed as a "promising alternative to traditional sites for preparing prospective teachers" (Holmes Group, 1986). More recently, NCATE specified teacher preparation rather than education preparation as one of the four functions of a PDS, and the NCATE PDS Draft Standards refer almost exclusively to teacher preparation and teacher education (NCATE, 1997) rather than to education in general and the preparation of educators. As noted by Ross, Brownell, Sindelar, and Vandiver (1999), "...other professionals are essentially absent from this literature." Abdal-Haqq (1997) reached the same conclusion and stated that "This too constitutes a potentially serious constraint on the overall impact that PDSs can have." Thus, preparation of educational professions such as principals and other educational administrators, school counselors, school psychologists, and related professionals (e.g., school social workers) has been largely overlooked in the PDS movement. PDSs that are concerned with the preparation of these professionals represent nontraditional and atypical collaborations.

A third issue is the stage of professional development that we focus on in PDSs. A number of the major PDS documents stress the importance of both preservice and in-service professional development occurring in a PDS site (Clark, 1999; Holmes Group, 1990; NCATE, 1997). In reality, however, the professional development emphasis in most PDSs appears to be on the SCDEs need to prepare teachers at the preservice level. According to Clark (1999), "almost all schools calling themselves professional development schools emphasize some element of preservice education. Only a few focus on retraining practicing teachers or on some other form of staff development. For many,

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staff development activity is limited to incidental learning by the teachers in the PDS." Abdal-Haqq (1999) has cited research indicating that educators perceive the PDS "...primarily as a venue for preservice teacher training." As such, PDSs that focus on in-service professional development represent nontraditional sites.

If PDSs are primarily concerned with preservice professional development, a fourth issue is the criteria that SCDEs use in selecting PDSs as training sites. Although Abdal-Haqq (1999) noted that some PDS partnerships are deliberately located in low-performing schools with low-income and ethnically or racially diverse communities, SCDEs are concerned with providing exemplary role models and settings for teacher preparation. Low-performing schools frequently do not meet these conditions. As a result, it is often the case that the schools selected and the student population within the PDS schools comprise groups who tend to be successful in terms of student achievement (AACTE, 1992). Thus, PDS sites that are located in inner city schools and poor rural schools represent nontraditional sites.

Although PDSs are intended to include multiple stakeholders, a fifth issue is that, in reality, most PDSs include only schools and university partners (Abdal-Haqq, 1999). A number of authors (e.g., Lawson et al., 1995) have asserted that reform of schools and teacher education alone will not be sufficient to serve the needs of children in poverty areas. Community-school-university partnerships that develop support and empowerment for children and families are viewed as necessary step for removing systemic constraints on children's learning (Abdal-Haqq, 1999; Lawson et al., 1995). However, PDSs that include parents and community partners represent nontraditional sites at this time.

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This lack of connection between and among professionals in the schools, the lack of involvement of those preparing for roles other than teaching within a school setting, and the scarce attention to students and schools in which problems are the greatest could weaken and/or doom PDS as an educational reform and restructuring movement. As such it behooves SCDEs to review their agendas and responsibilities when selecting PDS sites. The sites that have traditionally been selected are unlikely to enable us to accomplish the goals of reforming schools and restructuring the curriculum of colleges and universities that prepare educators.

The objective of this symposium is to broaden perspectives about what constitutes a PDS, what is possible in a PDS, and about the responsibility of SCDEs to select sites that support equity for all student and adult learners, not just the most successful (NCATE, 1997). These objectives will be accomplished, in part, by panel members describing a variety of nontraditional PDS efforts in which they are involved and what they are learning from these collaborations. It will also be facilitated through their dialogue with you, the audience, and with two discussants who are well known for their PDS contributions.

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